

visible for probably forty seconds. It appeared first as if approaching from the W.S.W. about 40° or 50° above the horizon, unusually large and bright, and leaving a long train of bright spots behind. After a few seconds it seemed extinguished, but in a moment or two flashed out again still brighter, apparently passing due E., at a height of about 25° or 30°, through Eridanus, Lepus, Canis Major, and Argo, and much slower than at first. While passing under Orion two protuberances burst out, giving it the appearance of an arrowhead, or rather a bird flying, as it appeared to have a tail which at the end was a fine smoke colour: it now occupied the space of 1½° or 2°. Passing behind a cloud below Regulus it disappeared.

Waterford, March 9

JAMES BUDD

### "Whin"

CAN you or any of your readers furnish a probable etymology of the word *whin*? Over all the north of England and south of Scotland basalt is so called. Here we have the *whin-sill* or stratiform basalt—*whin-dykes*, or geological fissures filled with basalt. The vocabularies in treatises on geology give no derivation of this prevalent mining term. In Scotland *whin* seems to typify the hardest mineral known. Burns makes Death say in "Hornbuiik," "I might as weel hae tried a quarry o' hard *whin* rock." Surely a satisfactory root for the word in question can be found in Celtic, Old Norse, Danish, or Anglo-Saxon! The Old Norse "fors" is found in the names of several local waterfalls, as for instance "High Force" in Teesdale. At this "force" the river Tees is precipitated over a whin-stone cliff. Soft. high.

WM. R. BELL

Laithkirk Vicarage, Mickleton, March 12

### CUCKOO AND PIPIT

SEVERAL well-known naturalists who have seen my sketch from life of the young cuckoo ejecting the young pipit (opposite p. 22 of the little versified tale of which I send a copy)\* have expressed a wish that the details of my observations of the scene should be published. I therefore send you the facts, though the sketch itself seems to me to be the only important addition I have made to the admirably accurate description given by Dr. Jenner in his letter to John Hunter, which is printed in the "Philosophical Transactions" for 1788 (vol. lxxviii, pp. 225, 226), and which I have read with pleasure since putting down my own notes.

The nest which we watched last June, after finding the cuckoo's egg in it, was that of the common meadow pipit (Titlark, Mosscheeper), and had two pipit's eggs besides that of the cuckoo. It was below a heather bush, on the declivity of a low abrupt bank on a Highland hill-side in Moidart.

At one visit the pipits were found to be hatched, but not the cuckoo. At the next visit, which was after an interval of forty-eight hours, we found the young cuckoo alone in the nest, and both the young pipits lying down the bank, about ten inches from the margin of the nest, but quite lively after being warmed in the hand. They were replaced in the nest beside the cuckoo, which struggled about till it got its back under one of them, when it climbed backwards directly up the open side of the nest, and hitched the pipit from its back on to the edge. It then stood quite upright on its legs, which were straddled wide apart, with the claws firmly fixed half-way down the inside of the nest among the interlacing fibres of which the nest was woven; and, stretching its wings apart and backwards, it elbowed the pipit fairly over the margin so far that its struggles took it down the bank instead of back into the nest.

After this the cuckoo stood a minute or two, feeling back with its wings, as if to make sure that the pipit was

fairly overboard, and then subsided into the bottom of the nest.

As it was getting late, and the cuckoo did not immediately set to work on the other nestling, I replaced the ejected one, and went home. On returning next day, both nestlings were found, dead and cold, out of the nest. I replaced one of them, but the cuckoo made no effort to get under and eject it, but settled itself contentedly on the top of it. All this I find accords accurately with Jenner's description of what he saw. But what struck me most was this: The cuckoo was perfectly naked, without a vestige of a feather or even a hint of future feathers; its eyes were not yet opened, and its neck seemed too weak to support the weight of its head. The pits had well-developed quills on the wings and back, and had bright eyes, partially open; yet they seemed quite helpless under the manipulations of the cuckoo, which looked a much less developed creature. The cuckoo's legs, however, seemed very muscular, and it appeared to feel about with its wings, which were absolutely featherless, as with hands, the "spurious wing" (unusually large in proportion) looking like a spread-out thumb. The most singular thing of all was the direct purpose with which the blind little monster made for the open side of the nest, the only part where it could throw its burthen down the bank. I think all the spectators felt the sort of horror and awe at the apparent inadequacy of the creature's intelligence to its acts that one might have felt at seeing a toothless hag raise a ghost by an incantation. It was horribly "uncanny" and "growsome." J. B.

The University, Glasgow

### DR. G. E. DAY

IN a former number, under the date of February 8, we had the painful duty of announcing the death, at the age of fifty-six, of Dr. George Edward Day, F.R.S., Emeritus Chandos Professor of Medicine in the University of St. Andrews, which took place at Torquay on January 31, 1872. Most of his earlier friends had probably heard of the sad accident which reduced him to a state of bodily helplessness, and which darkened his latter years; but few of those who remembered him only as the genial witty Cantab, overflowing with life and spirits, and as the brilliant medical student at Edinburgh, carrying everything before him in class-room and debating hall, or later, as the active untiring President of the Medical Examinations at St. Andrews, would have supposed him capable of the cheerful resignation with which he submitted to his enforced exclusion from all participation in active, professional, and social life.

The story of Dr. Day's life is a sad record of brilliant expectations suddenly wrecked, and long continued struggles against irreparable calamities.

As the eldest son of a wealthy country gentleman of good position, his fortune seemed assured from his birth; but the failure of the Swansea Bank in 1825, when he was scarcely ten years old, ruined his father, and led to his removal to the house of a widowed grandmother.

In 1834, after some preparation under a private tutor, he went up to Cambridge with the reputation of an able mathematician, and a good classical scholar. At the University he worked splendidly by fits and starts, but the period between 1834 and 1837 does not belong to the working era of Cambridge, and George Day's natural love of fun and the fascination of his manner combined to render his society especially attractive to his comrades, and the result was, that he came out as low as twelfth among the wranglers of his year.

On leaving Cambridge he resolved to adopt medicine as his future profession, and went to Edinburgh, where he at once took his place among that brilliant band of

\* "The Pipits," illustrated by Mrs. Hugh Blackburn (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1872).